THE BLIND VICTORIAN
HENRY FAWCETT
AND BRITISH LIBERALISM

EDITED BY

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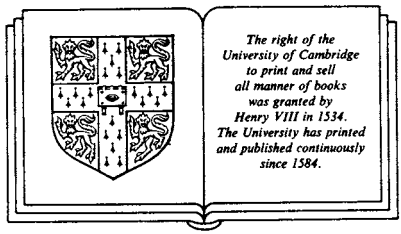

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Contents

III POLITICS

Illustrations

Introduction 'An advanced Liberal' Henry Fawcett, 1833–1884

LAWRENCE GOLDMAN

I

Henry Fawcett was born on 26 August 1833 in Salisbury, Wiltshire, the third of four children. His father, William, a draper, originally from Kirkby Lonsdale in Westmorland, had arrived in Salisbury in 1815. He opened his own shop in the town in 1825, and two years later secured his rising social status by marrying Mary Cooper, a daughter of the solicitor who acted as the local agent for the Whigs. The Fawcetts were staunch Liberals and their strict party loyalty rubbed off: there is no need to look far for the origins of Fawcett's Liberalism.[1] In the year of the Great Reform Act, William Fawcett was Mayor of Salisbury; eleven years later in 1843, when Cobden and Bright visited the town as they took their anti-protection campaign into the heart of rural England, they stayed with the Fawcetts.[2]

Henry was not a precocious child. He was educated first at a dame school, proceeding from there through two other schools until he was sent to King's College School in London in 1849. It was evident that he had a talent for mathematics but not for classics and after a brief spell at King's College itself he entered Peterhouse in Cambridge in October 1852, coming up while the Royal Commission appointed in 1850 to investigate 'the state, discipline, studies and revenues of the University' was still sitting. Leslie Stephen first saw him on the towpath of the Cam, 'a very tall, gaunt figure swinging along with huge strides ... over 6 feet 3 inches in height ... remarkably large of bone and massive of limb'.[3] The pathetic contrast in later life between this powerful frame and physique, full of

[1] Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember* (London, 1924), p. 58.
[2] Leslie Stephen, *Life of Henry Fawcett* (London, 1885), p. 4.
[3] ibid., p. 18.

1 Henry Fawcett as a student in Cambridge in 1855 before he was blinded, from an engraving by Joseph Brown after a photograph

restless energy, and the dependence caused by blindness, was not lost on contemporaries.

Fawcett determined early that he would aim for a Fellowship. Ever alert to the main chance, he migrated from Peterhouse within a year when he discovered stiff internal competition for a Fellowship there, entering Trinity Hall where standards were not so exacting. He was disappointed to be classed Seventh Wrangler in the Mathematical Tripos – a higher position had been generally expected – but it was enough to secure him election to a Fellowship at Trinity Hall at Christmas 1856. His first objective had been achieved and Fawcett set out on his next – to win a place in politics by the traditional means open to a young man of talent who lacked connections and money: a career at the bar. As he wrote to a friend just before he entered Lincoln's Inn in the autumn of 1856, 'I started life as a boy with the ambition some day to enter the House of Commons. Every effort, every endeavour, which I have ever put forth has had this object in view.'[4] But Fawcett's career at the bar was cruelly short, terminated by the accident that left him totally and permanently blind – yet an accident that paradoxically changed everything and nothing for him.

Ironically, Fawcett had serious problems with his eyes before the accident. In the winter of 1856–7 he was advised to take 'perfect rest' to restore his failing sight, affected by over-work.[5] Then, on 17 September 1858, Fawcett went out shooting with his father, and William Fawcett, with a cataract in one eye failed to see his son in advance of the party. He fired at some partridges and two pellets went through the tinted spectacles that Henry had been advised to wear, blinding him in both eyes.[6] Fawcett apparently once told a friend that it took him just 'one night to decide whether the loss of my sight should make any difference in my life or not; I decided it should not'.[7] Whether or not this is true, it is clear that within a matter of weeks he had come to terms with blindness and determined to continue as before. For the rest of his life he continued to walk vigorously, ride, skate and fish when he could. He rowed at Cambridge in a dons' eight called the 'Ancient Mariners'; he even went roller-skating soon after it was introduced.[8] And his plans to enter Parliament were not altered in intention, though it was evident that the route to politics via the bar was now closed to him. Instead, he struck out on a more individual strategy (and a relatively new one in the 1860s, as Christopher Harvie points out in this volume, though it was to become more common in later years): to

[4] Fawcett to Mrs Hodding quoted in ibid., pp. 38–9.
[5] ibid., p. 35.
[6] ibid., pp. 43–5.
[7] Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (London, 1931), p. 23.
[8] Winifred Holt, *A Beacon for the Blind. Being a Life of Henry Fawcett, the Blind Postmaster General* (London, 1915), p. 171.

2 Henry Fawcett in the late 1860s

enter politics on the basis of an academic position and a reputation built up by writing in the journals, speaking on the platform and generally being noticed. Seven years after his accident he had won his seat in Parliament and it is in this sense that blindness changed nothing in his life. He did not allow it to alter his ultimate ambition and sense of purpose.

Fawcett's very success in overcoming such a handicap obscures the many problems he faced. Blindness could only bring sadness and pathos: 'he was always asking his friends how Milly was looking and begging them for descriptions of her face'.[9] And, especially in the early years, there was the difficulty of convincing others of his capabilities and self-reliance. In his first election campaign in Southwark in 1860 the electors of the borough needed reassurance that if returned to the Commons he would be able to catch the Speaker's eye in debate.[10] He was initially blackballed by the committee of the Reform Club and it was only Thackeray's intervention which secured his election.[11] In presenting a testimonial on Fawcett's behalf to the electors of the Chair of Political Economy at Cambridge, Mill felt it necessary to counter the objection arising 'from Mr. Fawcett's inability to read his lectures'.[12] And his blindness was used to explain his exclusion from the cabinet in 1880. It was contended that his reliance on a secretary would breach the necessary confidentiality of cabinet papers, though the suspicion remains that here was a convenient excuse for keeping out such a potentially disruptive force from the inner circles of government.

On the other hand, there was no cynicism in Stephen's judgement that his friend turned blindness 'by his special courage, into something like an advantage'.[13] After all, in urging Fawcett to follow his ambition Mill had expected that his 'misfortune' would tell 'very much in your favour, not only by exciting interest, and neutralising envy and jealousy, but because it will cause you to be much sooner talked about'.[14] He was right, of course. And Fawcett's triumph over handicap was no small benefit to a political economist who sought to instruct the masses that economic and moral improvement could only be obtained by their own efforts and self-reliance. The man on the platform was living proof of the virtues he preached. Indeed, it was on the platform that blindness told most obviously in his favour: his Oxford contemporaries G. C. Brodrick and James Bryce agreed that blindness 'compelled him to concentrate his

[9] Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, p. 36.
[10] *Morning Star* (London), 12 Nov. 1860, p. 2.
[11] Holt, *A Beacon for the Blind*, p. 127.
[12] *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (25 vols., Toronto, 1963–), vol. 15, p. 860.
[13] Leslie Stephen, 'Henry Fawcett. In Memoriam', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 51 (Dec. 1884), p. 130.
[14] Mill to Fawcett, 26 Feb. 1860, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, p. 688.

thoughts and train his memory' so that 'he became a master of lucid statement and cogent argument'.[15] There is no doubting the astonishing effect that Fawcett could induce on a hall crowded with hundreds of listeners. The blind M.P., tall and eloquent, could fascinate and mesmerise. As one listener recalled his speeches on behalf of the candidacy of the working man, George Odger, at the Southwark by-election in 1870,

> It was my first experience of hearing a blind person address a crowded audience, and to watch him as he stood close to the platform's edge, a tall commanding figure, and then to realise that he could not *see* the people he was speaking to affected me deeply. At the end of ten minutes the reaction came. Whether he was able to use his eyes no longer interested me; his lips were all that mattered. I saw nothing else, and time and time again I caught myself anticipating half aloud the words that were about to fall from his lips.[16]

II

Fawcett returned to Cambridge early in 1859. If the years before he entered university represent a first phase in his life, and the period up to his accident a second phase, then a third phase now began and lasted until his election to Parliament in 1865. Using Cambridge as his base, Fawcett sallied forth into a series of electoral contests, into various public arena and into the society of Liberal intellectuals and activists. His attitude to the university was a mixture of the progressive and the complacent. In academic matters he was a conservative, admiring mental discipline and the rigorous intellectual gymnastics of the traditional Tripos and decrying 'research' and the development of new subjects and specialisms.[17] His attitude to university studies was thus at one with the intellectual limitations that many of his friends and contemporaries noted in him. An editorial in *The Times* in April 1874 spoke for them all: 'There are, without doubt, more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in Mr. Fawcett's philosophy.'[18] And that was just the point: Fawcett showed a 'want of interest in the questions generally called philosophical'.[19] As Bryce put it, his 'was an eminently English intellect' with a 'broad, commonsense way of looking at things'.[20] Leslie Stephen's hilarious *Sketches from Cambridge* in 1865 described the traditional diet there of mathematics and classics as a 'race-course for rival candidates to run'.[21]

[15] G. C. Brodrick, *Memories and Impressions, 1831–1900* (London, 1900), p. 264; Viscount Bryce, 'Preface' to Holt, *A Beacon for the Blind*, p. x.
[16] F. W. Soutter, *Recollections of a Labour Pioneer* (London, 1923), p. 50.
[17] Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen. The Godless Victorian* (London, 1984), p. 34.
[18] *The Times*, 27 April 1874, p. 11. [19] Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, p. 94.
[20] Bryce, 'Preface' to Holt, *A Beacon for the Blind*, p. x.
[21] [Leslie Stephen], *Sketches from Cambridge. By a Don* (London and Cambridge, 1865), p. 42.

Stephen was being ironic, using images of sport and competition to criticise a curriculum of which he disapproved. Fawcett, however, used the same language in a spirit of reverential earnest: 'the race', he wrote, 'is a manly and noble contest'.[22] The prize at the end was the Fellowship, and throughout his life Fawcett hymned the academic contest by which these were secured. Where many, even in an age of university reform, saw privilege and exclusivism, Fawcett saw an intellectual meritocracy allowing poor boys like himself to take their place at the High Table of life. 'What other coveted distinction is there', he asked, 'which wealth and rank have no influence in securing?'[23] Cambridge provided a model of open competition (or so he believed) that Fawcett so admired in all other spheres, and as a university reformer he was committed to opening up the old universities so as to admit, at least in theory, all sects and all classes. In this respect he was squarely representative of a generation graduating in the 1850s and 1860s whose journey into Liberalism and radicalism began with consideration of the role of the university in a changing culture. From 1857, when Fawcett took his place on a committee of young Cambridge dons set up to secure the abolition of celibacy among senior members of the university,[24] this issue was at the head of his concerns, and it was on questions of university reform that Fawcett made his political reputation and achieved notoriety in the later 1860s and early 1870s.

Election to the Chair of Political Economy in November 1863 secured Fawcett's position in the university and doubled his income to around £600 a year – no small consideration for a man bent on a political career. Fawcett had developed a serious interest in political economy after his election to a Fellowship and he began work on his *Manual of Political Economy* – the book by which he was best known – in the autumn of 1861. He had been encouraged to write the *Manual* by his Cambridge friend, the publisher Macmillan. Both men were aware that the Chair of Political Economy, held by the aged Pryme, would probably soon fall vacant and that Fawcett's candidacy would be far more serious with a book behind him.[25] The timing was perfect. The *Manual* was published in early 1863 and Pryme retired that summer. There then followed the election. As Leslie Stephen later wrote to James Russell Lowell, he had been busy

[22] Henry Fawcett, 'On the exclusion of those who are not members of the Established Church from Fellowships and other privileges of the English Universities', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 3 (March 1861), p. 414.

[23] ibid.

[24] See Fawcett to R. Potts, 17 May 1857, in 'Memorial, signatures, correspondence, etc. on the celibacy question. Cambridge, 1857', Cambridge University Library, Add. 725(c).

[25] Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, p. 117.

in securing the election to a professorship of political economy of my blind friend Fawcett ... As the electors were the resident M.A.s who are almost *ex-officio* Conservatives and High Churchmen, and as my friend had the reputation of being an infidel Radical, this wanted skill. However, I did it, or, at least humbly assisted in it, and very nearly got drunk on the occasion.[26]

Fawcett had been a member of the Political Economy Club since 1861 and he could point to testimonials from Mill, Herman Merivale, William Newmarch, W. T. Thornton, J. E. Thorold Rogers, T. E. Cliffe Leslie and Robert Lowe among others – an impressive clutch. But academic merit was not the only consideration and the young Liberal was opposed by many of the most powerful university figures. He only squeaked home because the St John's vote was split between two candidates from the college (one of whom, Leonard Courtney, was later to become a very close friend and an ally of Fawcett's in Parliament). 'I don't think an election has produced so much excitement at Cambridge for years' wrote Fawcett on the day following his success.[27]

This was by no means the only election that Fawcett fought in the early 1860s. Indeed, by the time he was elected to the Chair he was already a veteran of two parliamentary campaigns. In 1860 he began his political career in audacious style by presenting himself as a candidate at a by-election at Southwark.[28] In early 1863 he came close to election in Cambridge itself, beaten by 708 to 627 votes at a cost of some £600.[29] Then, a year later, he stood for the vacant seat at Brighton, finishing a creditable second in a field of four and only defeated by a split in the Liberal ranks. But he had made his mark: 'all my friends at Brighton seem to think I cannot be defeated there at the next election' he wrote soon afterwards.[30] And at the general election in 1865 he was elected for Brighton on a united Liberal vote at a cost of £900.[31] At the age of thirty-two he had achieved his ambition.

The achievement owed much to the encouragement and practical help of Fawcett's friends. His talent for conversation, his infectious optimism, inevitably made him a popular figure in the university and outside, and many gave of their time and talents to further the career of a blind man. Of all of these early friendships, that with Leslie Stephen, which is discussed in Stefan Collini's contribution to this volume, was most important. Though it cooled once Fawcett had a seat in Parliament and after Stephen

[26] F. W. Maitland, *The Life and Letters of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), p. 157 (1 Jan. 1864).
[27] ibid., pp. 117–22; G. P. Gooch, *Life of Lord Courtney* (London, 1920), pp. 58–61.
[28] See p. 153 below. [29] Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, pp. 203–6.
[30] Fawcett to Fanny Hertz, 3 Sept. 1864, Marshall Library, University of Cambridge, Misc. 1 (77).
[31] Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, p. 217.

had left Cambridge in 1867 on his marriage, it sustained Fawcett during these years.[32] Stephen not only masterminded his election to the Chair of Political Economy. In the Cambridge parliamentary election of 1863 he is pictured 'haranguing a Radical crowd from the window of an inn and "properly exciting" his audience'.[33] And in 1864 he led a party down to Brighton to canvas and agitate on Fawcett's behalf to the apparent dismay of the local residents.[34] It was all part of the game: 'we were young men, sanguine, bouyant and sociable' wrote Stephen in 1885.[35] The quotation is from Stephen's celebrated biography of his friend, written at the request of Mrs Fawcett in the months after Fawcett's death. Enlivened with elements of autobiography in its early chapters on Cambridge in the 1850s and 1860s, it was among the most popular of Stephen's books. But as a celebration of the life of a friend it could not be wholly honest. Ten years after it was published Stephen could be more detached:

> He was to the end a very dear friend of mine although the differences between us were so great that I am inclined to think that it was only the accident of our living at the same college during the period most favourable to the formation of friendships that could have brought us together.[36]

The judgement may be unduly harsh, coloured by the melancholy that enveloped Stephen's advancing years and his recognition of the change in his spirit on leaving Cambridge. Noel Annan has contended that 'intellectually, Stephen lost by his attachment to Fawcett nearly as much as he gained'.[37] Certainly there was an obvious imbalance in the relationship. On Fawcett's return to Cambridge in 1859 'Stephen's tender care for him was beautiful to see' and it may have been that Stephen gave of himself so liberally out of sympathy rather than respect and true amity for his handicapped friend.[38] Stephen's impatience with Fawcett in 1874 'talking Mill's "Liberty" of the crudest kind at the top of his voice for an hour or two, till I damned all radicals as heartily as Ruskin', points the contrast between Fawcett's increasing stridency and dogmatism and Stephen's growing scepticism and doubt in the years after Cambridge.[39] It also points to the new friendship that Fawcett made in the 1860s with Mill himself.

Mill's intellectual influence over his young disciple is explored in Stefan Collini's essay. Mill was mentor, model and prophet for Fawcett in one. In his first letter to Mill at the end of 1859 Fawcett explained that 'for the last three years your books have been the chief education of my mind'.[40] In

[32] Maitland, *Life of Leslie Stephen*, p. 386. [33] ibid., p. 105. [34] ibid., p. 106.
[35] Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, p. 76. [36] Maitland, *Life of Leslie Stephen*, p. 48.
[37] Annan, *Leslie Stephen*, p. 40.
[38] Maitland, *Life of Leslie Stephen*, p. 105.
[39] Stephen to Charles Eliot Norton, 12 Oct. 1874, ibid., p. 246.
[40] Fawcett to Mill, 23 Dec. 1859, in Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, p. 102.

May 1867, when seconding Mill's amendment to the Reform Bill that would have extended the franchise to women, Fawcett averred that 'he had always looked up to the hon. Member for Westminster as his teacher, and from him he had learnt all his lessons of political life'.[41] From his own experience Fawcett could attest that 'a constantly increasing number of the young men of the greatest promise at Oxford and Cambridge' looked up to Mill 'as a master'[42] – he was just the most ardent and persistent of adulators. For his part, Mill accepted Fawcett as a disciple and follower: as he wrote to Helen Taylor in February 1860 after reading one of Fawcett's earliest papers, 'I think we may look to him with great hopes (notwithstanding his misfortune) as one of the successors'.[43] Mill first heard of Fawcett from his friend Thomas Hare who had seen him at the Bradford Congress of the Social Science Association in October 1859, and it was Hare who introduced the two men in February 1860.[44] Their common interest was Hare's scheme for electoral reform and the fruit of their early collaboration was Fawcett's first publication, the pamphlet *Mr Hare's Reform Bill, Simplified and Explained.* Mill gave advice on Fawcett's career, encouraging him in the strategy of 'making yourself known by well-considered writings' and reading the resulting pamphlets, papers and books.[45] Later they collaborated in Parliament in support of Hare's plan and in an attempt to improve the Bribery Bill of 1868, in addition to their support for women's enfranchisement, but all to no avail.[46] Throughout, it was a relationship of unequals, recognised as such by both men, that was cordial but never intimate. Thus Mill only learnt of Fawcett's marriage from the newspapers, and Millicent regarded an invitation to dinner with Mill and Helen Taylor 'as a very great honour'.[47] It is unlikely that Mill reciprocated Mrs Fawcett's sentiments: working with her in the women's movement of the period led to withering criticism of her 'prosaic, literal way of looking at things' and of her lack of 'a speculative [and] an organising intelligence'. Thus, 'even supposing that she were twice her present age, she is quite unfit to be a leader, though an excellent guerrilla

[41] *Hansard*, clxxxvii, 20 May 1867, 835.

[42] [Henry Fawcett] 'Mr. Mill's Treatise On Representative Government', *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. 4 (June 1861), p. 97.

[43] J. S. Mill to Helen Taylor, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, p. 686.

[44] Mill to Hare, 30 Oct. 1859; Mill to Helen Taylor, 17, 21 Feb. 1860, in ibid., pp. 642–3, 680, 682. See also p. 155 below.

[45] Mill to Fawcett, 24 Dec. 1860, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, p. 716.

[46] On women's suffrage, see *Hansard*, clxxxvii, 20 May 1867, 835–8. On the 'Bribery Bill' (the Election Petitions and Corrupt Practices at Elections Bill) see ibid., cxcii, 21 May 1868, 680, 685; cxciii, 18, 22, 23, 24 July 1868, 1439–58, 1615–51, 1675–92, 1715–33.

[47] Mill to Fawcett, 1 May 1867, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, p. 1266. M. G. Fawcett, *What I Remember*, p. 60.

partisan'.[48] As Millicent's subsequent career showed, even John Stuart Mill could be wrong.

III

Marriage to Millicent, the subject of David Rubinstein's essay in this collection, was another product of this period of Fawcett's life – a period that saw him striking out in various directions from his base in Cambridge. It was the classic Liberal match. They met at a party at the Campden Hill home of the radical M.P., Peter Taylor, in May 1865. It was entirely appropriate that Fawcett should have been attracted by the voice of a young woman expressing in conversation her sense of the tragic sadness of Lincoln's recent assassination.[49] Support for the North in the American Civil War was an article of faith for Fawcett and a defining feature of 'university radicalism' as it emerged in the early 1860s. But Millicent was not his first love: Fawcett had made at least three unsuccessful proposals before his engagement to Millicent, two of them, as befitted a man who was to become known for his feminism, to notable figures in the mid-Victorian women's movement. As David Rubinstein explains, he had proposed unsuccessfully to Bessie Rayner Parkes, whom he had probably met at the Bradford Congress of the Social Science Association in October 1859. Five years later, in the autumn of 1864 he was engaged to the Hon. Miss Eden, almost certainly Eleanor Eden, the daughter of Lord Auckland, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, though the engagement only lasted for a matter of weeks.[50] And before Millicent Garrett there was her older sister, Elizabeth, soon to become famous (as Elizabeth Garrett Anderson) as the first female physician trained and practising in Britain.[51] Fawcett's proposal of marriage on 8 May 1865 was declined immediately by Elizabeth on grounds of her devotion to her career. Yet

[48] Mill to George Croom Robertson, 6, 21 Nov. 1871, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, pp. 1850, 1921.

[49] M. G. Fawcett, *What I Remember*, p. 21; Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, p. 21.

[50] See *Salisbury Journal*, 27 Aug. 1864, p. 5. The short report on Fawcett's engagement only mentions 'the Hon. Miss Eden'. Lord Auckland had five daughters but only three were unmarried in 1864. And of these three only Eleanor Eden fits the newspaper's description of Fawcett's fiancée as 'an author' of 'several works ... within the last three or four years'. Eleanor Eden, who was born in 1826, wrote several novels and improving tracts for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. She never married and died in 1879. I am indebted to David Rubinstein's thorough investigation for this information.

See also Fawcett to Fanny Hertz, 3 Sept. 1864: 'The report of my engagement to Miss Eden is quite correct – I think when you know her, that you will approve of my choice. She is sensible, very liberal in her opinions, thoroughly unaffected, and a first rate reader; and I believe she warmly sympathises with my tastes and pursuits.' Marshall Library, Misc. 1 (77). See also Fawcett to Fanny Hertz, 29 Nov. 1864, ibid. (78).

[51] See p. 71 below. For an earlier account of this affair, see Jo Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson* (London, 1965), pp. 156–7.

within a matter of days he was introduced to her younger sister Millicent and a new relationship had begun. They became engaged in October 1866, though they then endured several anxious weeks as Millicent came under familial pressure to break the engagement to a relatively poor, blind man. Objections from Millicent's father, Newson Garrett, a merchant and shipowner from Aldeburgh, Suffolk, who built the Maltings at Snape that is now the home of the annual Aldeburgh Music Festival, and from Elizabeth (who may have been jealous or piqued, or genuinely concerned about Henry's prospects – her motives in this are not clear and her feelings can only be guessed at) were weighed in the balance and found wanting. The couple were married on St George's Day, 1867.[52]

Millicent and Henry Fawcett are among the more renowned marital partnerships of the Victorian period. Mrs Fawcett was an intellectual companion with whom Henry could discuss politics and political economy, his speeches, his books – all the details of his career. For four years after their marriage Millicent served as his secretary, grappling 'with newspapers and blue books'.[53] Initially they kept two modest homes in Cambridge and London, constrained by a professorial salary: apparently the couple were often seen walking arm in arm in Cambridge, forgoing a carriage to save a little.[54] But after 1875 they were able to purchase two more substantial houses – 51, The Lawn, South Lambeth Road, about twenty minutes walk from Westminster, and 18, Brookside, Cambridge. The latter is now home to the university's Department of Education – a fitting change of occupancy given Fawcett's passionate interest in all questions educational. In 1868 their only child, Philippa, was born. They were 'advanced' parents, giving her considerable freedom of expression and movement, and the results, at least if judged in academic terms, were successful.[55] As a student at Newnham, the Cambridge college her parents had worked to found, Philippa achieved what her father had hoped for but failed in: long before women were officially classed, she excelled in the Mathematical Tripos in 1890, emerging considerably ahead of the designated Senior Wrangler.[56] It was a familial triumph and a tremendous coup for the women's movement.

Fawcett's feminism pre-dated his marriage to Millicent as a number of letters from Mill indicate.[57] It was merely confirmed, though also altered in significant ways, by his wife. After 1867 he played a part in a variety of feminist campaigns. The first meeting of the committee to create

[52] Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson*, p. 181; Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, pp. 27–9.
[53] M. G. Fawcett, *What I Remember*, p. 64.
[54] ibid., p. 55; Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, p. 36.
[55] Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, p. 70.
[56] ibid., p. 143; M. G. Fawcett, *What I Remember*, p. 139.
[57] Mill to Helen Taylor, 21 Feb. 1860; Mill to Fawcett, 21 July 1862, 14 Oct. 1863, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, pp. 683, 787, 890.

Newnham College was held in the Fawcett's drawing room in Cambridge in late 1869.[58] He was a consistent advocate of women's suffrage – an issue over which he fell foul of Gladstone when a member of the government in 1883–4 – and he took a position on the more radical wing of the movement that favoured enfranchising married women as well as widows and spinsters.[59] As Postmaster General, moreover, he opened a number of positions in the Post Office to women, and after the Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1882 he gave a woman postmistress the option of retaining her appointment in her own name rather than transferring it to her husband – a small but indicative measure. His objection to the special protection of women under the Factory Acts, however, brought controversy and undermined his relationship with the trades union movement. He had favoured the extension of factory legislation in 1867 which had brought the working conditions of large numbers of women under the regulation of statute for the first time. But by 1873, as David Rubinstein shows, he had adopted the view prevalent in the women's movement and espoused by Mrs Fawcett that specific restrictions on the labour of adult women were discriminatory, forcing women out of many trades and lowering their wages.[60] He lost many old friends in the labour movement and was unanimously condemned at the Trades Union Congress in Sheffield in January 1874 for his allegation that proposed legislation to limit the hours of women was the work of male trades unionists seeking to restrict the competition of women's labour.[61] One trades unionist, writing to *The Times*, accused him of 'a stab in the back from a so-called "People's Friend"' and warned him of the difficulty in recovering his place 'in the popular esteem'.[62]

As David Rubinstein conjectures, Fawcett may have come under the influence of his wife on this particular question. But it is doubtful if his feminism owed much in general spirit (as opposed to points of detail) either to Millicent's personal influence or the wider women's movement. Rather, it is best explained as a natural corollary of his Liberalism – an emancipatory creed that fought against all restrictions of opportunity as it fought against unearned privilege. Women were another group, not unlike the nonconformists and the respectable working class in this perspective, whose rights as citizens were being infringed by legal and institutional discrimination. This was a perspective that husband and wife shared (and mutually reinforced) though they had arrived at it by separate

[58] M. G. Fawcett, *What I Remember*, p. 73.

[59] 'Henry Fawcett' in Olive Banks (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists*, vol. 1, 1800–1930 (Brighton, 1985), p. 76.

[60] Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, p. 176; Ray Strachey, *The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London, 1923), pp. 234–5; *The Times*, 19 Jan. 1874, p. 7.

[61] *The Times*, 16 Jan. 1874, p. 12.

[62] ibid., 24 Jan. 1874, p. 5.

routes. Thus, in reply to an enquiry about women in the professions from a member of the Liberation Society, the political vanguard of religious dissent, Mrs Fawcett wrote of the inestimable value 'of the opportunity of free development to the individual . . . I think the principal argument is like the argument for Free Trade – train the faculties by a sound and healthy education, and then allow these faculties free scope in whatever direction nature and natural gifts may indicate as the fittest.'[63] This sounds like Henry. But, as recently argued, Mrs Fawcett also derived her feminism from a wider and antecedent Liberalism.[64] In this they were united, for Henry Fawcett's feminism, like that of his wife, was the product of a political philosophy opposed in social as in economic spheres to artificial and unjust restraints.

IV

What sort of Liberal was he? In 1860, Mill had called him a 'man of independent opinions'. Six years later Fawcett explained to the House of Commons that he had been called 'a Radical and a representative of the working classes', and in a letter to the Liberal M.P. Sir William Harcourt in July 1876 he described himself as 'an advanced Liberal'. As Stefan Collini suggests, there were elements in Fawcett's political creed which had their roots in the Philosophic Radicalism of the 1830s and the 'Manchester School' of the 1840s. His watchword, to be heard in several speeches, was 'merit, not birth' and he was committed to the idea 'that a career should be thrown open to all men of ability'.[65] He shared the deep suspicion of Cobden of abuses of government patronage, writing to Gladstone in April 1869 after the passage of the Political Pensions Act for information on 'all the offices which will be entitled to pensions under the new Act which were not entitled previously' and including some stiff remarks on the proliferation of 'sinecure offices'.[66] There was, too, a strong desire for a Liberalism dedicated to the abolition of anomalies and inconsistencies – a rational Liberalism imposing logical consistency by legislation and reform. So he was affronted by the absence of a provision

[63] M. G. Fawcett to J. Carvell-Williams, quoted in Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, pp. 76–7.

[64] Ann Oakley, 'Millicent Garrett Fawcett: duty and determination', in Dale Spender (ed.), *Feminist Theories. Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions* (London, 1983), pp. 190–2.

[65] Mill to Fawcett, 26 Feb. 1860, in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 15, p. 686; *Hansard*, clxxxiii, 13 March 1866, 200; Fawcett to Sir William Harcourt, 12 Jan. 1876, Harcourt Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, 207, fos. 1–3.; *Daily News*, 25 Jan. 1871, p. 2; Stephen, *Life of Fawcett*, p. 187.

[66] Fawcett to Gladstone, 4 April 1869, Gladstone Papers, British Library, Add. MS 44156, fo. 14. For the passage of the Political Pensions for Civil Offices Bill, see *Hansard*, cxciv, 22 Feb. 1869, 165–9.